

Now, as I mentioned, this is the second time in as many Congresses we have been on the brink of systemic reform. We are going to make it through the reform this time. I am so pleased at that. The students of America, whatever age, will benefit from this legislation. We talk about the need for education from the time you are born until the time you retire. We have some other pieces yet that we need to do, such as the Workforce Investment Act, but we are on course to get that done too.

The American system of higher education is renowned throughout the world. America's students will now be provided with the tools and assistance contained in both bills to complete their higher education and training to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to be competitive in a 21st-century economy.

I supported reporting both bills out of committee. I did ask they be considered together and had that expectation. So I am very pleased that the Senate Democratic leader has worked with us and provided an opportunity to have an open and full debate on the aspects of the Higher Education Act.

As debate on this bill comes to a close, it is necessary to thank those who worked long and hard on this bill. First and foremost, I thank Chairman KENNEDY. The bill we will be doing Monday is virtually a bill the two of us worked out last year, for which we got to that brink of getting done, and then it did not get done. So now we are presenting it again. I thank him for his commitment to keeping this process bipartisan.

Education is bipartisan. There is no partisanship in that. I think that will be displayed throughout the process. And I appreciate his working with me and my Republican colleagues on the HELP Committee throughout this entire process. We have a different process than some of the other committees. We use the markup to kind of find the direction, the intent and the intensity of the feelings on the issue, and then we actually keep working with people through that time to either correct the situation or to get an understanding of what it is we are really doing. Sometimes that even requires coming up with a third way. But that is what has happened in both of these bills, and it gets us to this point.

Now, it involves a tremendous amount of work on the part of members of the committee, but it also involves a tremendous amount of work by our staff. They work through weekends. They work late into evenings trying to resolve a lot of these things so it can get to the decision at the Member level.

So I particularly thank Katherine McGuire, my legislative director; Beth Beuhlmann, who heads up the education shop; Ann Clough; Adam Briddell; Amy Shank; Ilyse Schuman; Greg Dean; Kelly Hastings; and Lindsay Hunsicker.

I also thank the members of Senator KENNEDY's staff for their hard work: Michael Myers, who is doing a marvelous job of coordinating with us; Carmel Martin; J.D. LaRock; Missy Rohrbach; Emma Vadehra; Erin Renner; Raquel Alvarenga; and David Johns.

Finally, I thank all the members of the HELP Committee and their staffs for all their hard work throughout this process. It has been hard work making sure everybody had an understanding of all of these difficult issues and getting us to this point.

So again I thank the chairman for his hard work and cooperative work to be able to get this done for the kids of America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. NELSON of Florida). The majority leader is recognized.

#### AMERICA COMPETES ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, there is a lot of good news today legislatively.

I now ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 159, H.R. 2272, the House competitiveness bill; that all after the enacting clause be stricken and the text of the Senate companion, S. 761, as passed by the Senate, be inserted in lieu thereof; the bill be read a third time and passed, the motion to reconsider be laid on the table, the Senate insist on its amendment, request a conference with the House, and the Chair be authorized to appoint conferees.

Mr. President, let me say this is the end of a long haul to do a bill that is extremely important. This is a bipartisan bill. There are a number of people who have worked extremely hard on this legislation but no one harder than Senators BINGAMAN and ALEXANDER. I apologize for only mentioning their names. I am sure there are many others who worked just as hard as they did. I remember they were the first two who talked to me about it, and there has been a lot of time spent on this legislation.

It is a bill that was passed in the Senate with little opposition. I am so happy we can now go to conference. The House has already passed something. We can come back with a bill that I think will really help productivity in our country and help the educational aspects of students, especially in the scientific fields.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Republican leader is recognized.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object—and I will not object—there have been a number of people on both sides of the aisle who have been deeply invested in this America COMPETES Act. Several of them will be shortly announced by the Chair as conferees.

Particularly, I want to single out Senator STEVENS, Senator ENZI, Senator ENSIGN, and Senator COLEMAN, all

of whom will be named conferees, and, of course, Senator ALEXANDER and Senator DOMENICI, who were really the leaders on our side, in conjunction with Senator BINGAMAN, in developing this important bipartisan legislation.

Senator ALEXANDER kept pushing others forward. But, in fact, we all knew who the real leader on our side was on this issue. He, in a very selfless way, helped move a bipartisan group together to form this important legislation. I commend Senator ALEXANDER in particular for the role he played in all of this.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The bill (H.R. 2272), as amended, was read the third time and passed.

The Presiding Officer appointed Mr. BINGAMAN, Mr. INOUE, Mr. KENNEDY, Mr. LIEBERMAN, Ms. MIKULSKI, Mr. KERRY, Mr. NELSON of Florida, Mr. DOMENICI, Mr. STEVENS, Mr. ENZI, Mr. ALEXANDER, Mr. ENSIGN, and Mr. COLEMAN conferees on the part of the Senate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I join the two leaders in thanking our colleagues and thank them for moving this process forward in naming these conferees on the America COMPETES Act. I wish to underline the excellent work that was done under the bipartisan leadership of Senator BINGAMAN and Senator ALEXANDER, and the other members of our committee. They have worked long and hard on this legislation.

A very distinguished leader in business, Norm Augustine—who has been the head of many of our defense industries and is a real statesman in terms of defense policy—was enormously important in helping guide the bipartisan group, to get recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences, the National Academy of Engineering, the National Science Foundation, and others, to help prepare this legislation, and to make recommendations to the House and the Senate.

This is an enormously important effort to ensure that the United States can continue to be competitive in the world economy for years ahead. I think this is a very solid and important bipartisan effort. I join with our two leaders, thanking them for their recommendations in terms of conferees, and join in commending the bipartisan effort that has seen this as continuing progress.

#### COLLEGE COST REDUCTION ACT OF 2007—Continued

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I think with the consent agreement we are prepared to yield back the time we still have. I want to join, first of all, in thanking my friend and colleague from Wyoming, as I did in the opening of the discussion and debate on education. This reauthorization legislation—the